

REPORT OF THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT 2009

Evidence of the national economic downturn continued to be displayed in the decrease of new subdivision applications submitted to the Alton Planning Board during 2009. A total of two, new subdivisions were approved by the Board, resulting in a net gain of 13 newly created lots in the Town.

Twenty-five applications were submitted overall and included several site plans for new or expanded commercial ventures such as Chamberlain Springs local water bottling, The 1812 Hampshire House gift shop, Huggins Hospital satellite physician's office facility and additional commercial/retail businesses on the Hannaford property. Brewster Academy in Wolfeboro received a bequest of land at Robert's Cove which was proposed for a satellite campus of the school to be located in Alton.

On Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009, the Alton Bay Christian Conference Center located in Alton Bay suffered a catastrophic, 14-alarm fire which resulted in the loss of 43 cottages. Unfortunate as this event was, in retrospect it provided the opportunity for proactive planning of the Center's rebuild in the destroyed area, along with opening a dialogue between the Alton Board of Selectmen, Planning Board and other Town Departments to foster the highest and best use of the property in terms of density, fire safety, improved design standards and other important aspects of community cohesion.

The Zoning Board of Adjustment dealt with 13 active applications throughout 2009, including one case ruling which was challenged and successfully defended in court. The incidence of rebuilds of existing properties on lakeshore properties was significant, owing in part to the stringent State guidelines imposed in July under new amendments to the Comprehensive Shoreland Protection Act.

The decrease in planning and zoning applications in 2009 allowed both planning and zoning boards to concentrate on actual planning issues such as alternative energy wind turbines, workforce housing, built density and light pollution issues. We appreciate the cross-connectivity both boards bring to the planning table along with interaction by the Conservation Commission and other Alton municipal departments.

The planner was actively involved in the submission of a Transportation Enhancement grant application to NHDOT which would support the creation of a pedestrian path from the B&M Railroad Park to the Alton Circle along town-owned, former rail corridor. This application is the first component of a long-range plan to upgrade and expand pedestrian access between the Alton Traffic Circle and Main Street, providing sidewalk connectivity and safe amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists. Future phases of the grant would also provide rehabilitation of historic railroad structures at the park, providing a true "center of town" for all Alton residents. We appreciate the opportunity to work collaboratively with civic groups in Alton, such as the Alton Historic Society and the Downtown Revitalization Association.

Nothing stops change; but an involved community and proactive planning and zoning boards provide an opportunity to shape and shepherd ongoing change into action reflective of Alton's community ideals.

If you are interested in becoming an alternate member of either board, please contact the Alton Planning Department at 875-2162.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon A. Penney
Alton Town Planner